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ABSTRACT

This study compared narratives in Spanish, Basque, and English of a 5-year-old trilingual child. The child produced narratives of a familiar story, learned through an English video recording, in each language while looking at a printed version of the story. All interlocutors were adult native speakers of the languages, well known to the child. The three interactions were videotape-recorded. In English, he produced 78 utterances with a mean length of 6.115. The total number of words spoken was 477, with 153 word types. In Basque, he produced 74 utterances with a mean length of 8.18. and 457 words with 196 different word types. In Spanish, he produced 35 utterances with a mean length of 6.17, and 216 words with 82 word types. Analysis also examined phonetic, grammatical, discourse-related, and pragmatic characteristics of the narratives. It is concluded that the child's strongest language is Basque, with more fluent and accurate production, despite the fact that he had seen the original video story only in English. Spanish production was elicited and was limited to description of a few elements in each picture, with all narrative in the present tense. Code mixing was not common in the data obtained, but some cross-linguistic influence was found. Contains eight references. (MSE)

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EARLY TRILINGUALISM: BASQUE, ENGLISH, AND SPANISH

ED 413 761

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INTRODUCTION

Even though multilingualism is a common phenomenon in the world today it is not so common to acquire three languages from an early age and the number of research studies on early trilingualism and early trilingual acquisition is very limited (Hoffmann, 1985; Helot, 1988; Mikes, 1990). The study of early trilingualism has some characteristics in common with the study of first language acquisition (Wanner & Gleitman, 1982; Ingram, 1989; Gleason, 1993) and early bilingualism (De Hower, 1990; Idiazabal, 1985; Meisel, 1994) but it also presents different patterns of language development because it involves more complex relationships among the different languages and more potential cases of cross-linguistic influence.

The study described in this paper is a case study of narratives in three languages: English, Basque and Spanish, produced by a trilingual child.

THE CHILD

The child, Mikel, is the eldest of three children in a trilingual family. He was 5;0 at the time of the recording and he has a brother of 3;1 and a sister of 1;2. The family live in a small industrial town where both Spanish and Basque are spoken though, as is the case throughout the Basque Country, Basque is the minority language. The child has, since birth, been in contact with English, Basque and to a lesser extent Spanish. His father and his father's family are Basque speakers and have always spoken to him in Basque. His mother always speaks English to him and his mother and

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father communicate in English, which is the language of the home. His first childminder from 0;6 to 1;0 spoke to him in Basque, although she was not a native speaker. His second childminder from 1;0 to 2;0 was a monolingual Spanish speaker. He has attended a Basque speaking kindergarten since 2;1, and usually speaks Basque to his brother who also attends the school. Mikel tends to address his baby sister in English. Mikel has been to England on four occasions, the longest stays being for one month when he was 1;0 and 2;11. English-speaking relatives also visit Mikel's family on a regular basis.

At the time the Spanish version of the story was recorded Mikel had just returned from a fortnight's holiday in Alicante with his family. Although he had been acquiring some Spanish at school through contact with children from Spanish speaking home backgrounds, this was his first opportunity to use the language in a monolingual context.

This study aims at examining the child's narrative skills in English, Basque and Spanish. The English version of the story was expected to be the best in terms of style and vocabulary as the child knows the story in English. The Spanish version was expected to be the poorest of the three because the child was less exposed to this language.

METHOD

The story chosen for this study was the Lion King. Mikel has seen the video of the Lion King in English numerous times. He was asked to retell the story while looking at a printed version of the story. The recordings were carried out in English, Basque and Spanish on different dates between April and July 1996. All the interlocutors were adult native speakers of English, Basque and Spanish and well known to the child. The three interactions were video-recorded and later transcribed in order to be analyzed.

Mikel kept his attention firmly on the book and its pictures during his story-telling sessions, turning the page when appropriate and adopting a `story-telling´ attitude.

- **RESULTS IN ENGLISH**

Mikel produced 78 utterances in English and the Mean Length Utterance was 6.115 (S.D. 3.347).

Phonetics. Mikel has a slight foreign accent in English and he has some specific problems at the segmental level.

-He has problems articulating /r/ in initial position and he pronounces /w/ instead of /r/

1.13 *Wafiki (Rafiki)*
1.38 *weady (ready)*

-When he pronounces 'Scar' he tends to add an /e/ in front of the name

1.7. eScar

-In one of the utterances he pronounces `the´ with a long /i:/ which is not usual preceding a consonant

1.5. Mufasa show him all **the** kingdom

Mikel's production includes some filled and unfilled pauses and in the case of filled pauses he alternates the English hesitation marker /er/ with the Basque marker /ba/. His intonation is native-like.

2. Vocabulary. The total number of words (tokens) produced by Mikel is 477 and as there are 153 different word types the type/token ratio is 0.320. The vocabulary includes common words and specific words that Mikel must have learned from the video, which he watched in English. These

specific words are: **'wildebeest'**, **'grubs'** and **'hyenas'**. Some interesting points observed in the child's narrative were the following:

-Mikel seems not to know `tell´ as he does not use this form, preferring to use `say´ with an indirect object incorrectly:

l.33 I **said** you

-In several instances Mikel uses `get´ with the meaning `have´ as in `have got´ :

1.64 then Nala is **get** a friend

-He also presents some vocabulary problems in the following utterances:

l.59 grubs they're very **crawling**
l.60 this **made you bigger**
l.62 he **do his hair on**

3. Grammar. Mikel narrates the story in the past but he has some problems with **irregular past forms**. The child adopts different strategies:

-In some cases he overgeneralizes and produces an incorrect past form as:

1.28 then they **gone** to a xxx
1.39 then Simba **camed** and **saw**
1.61 But Rakifi **thinked** because Simba was a big lion and he do his hair on

-In other cases he uses the present tense without the third person -s or the auxiliary:

1.45 then he **get** squashed

l.10 if he **want** to be the king, he must kill Mufasa

l.15 he **don't know** what that island call

-Nevertheless Mikel also produces **correct irregular and regular** past forms as in:

1.46 and then he **died**

1.6 they **had** a baby

1.42 and Mufasa **jumped** onto the tree

1.39 Zazu **came** and **saw** Simba on a tree

1.22 and Simba **said** no

1.9 and Scar **wanted** to be him the king

-Mikel also has problems with **modal verbs in the negative** (but not with other negatives or interrogatives):

l.16 you **no must** go there

l. 51 you **no have** to be any

l.53 you **no have** to kill me

l.23 my father **said not to go** there

l.35 **don't go** into that island

l.49 he **didn't wake up**

l. 67 what's your name?

-Mikel combines correct and incorrect uses of the **future tense:**

1.54 I **will kill** you

l.83 then you **will is** the king Simba

-Other problems with verb tenses include the frequent use of an incorrect structure involving the verb `**to be**´ with a participle.

l.13 Wafiki **is show** him only in the animals

l.24 there **is live** hyenas and Scar

l.29 then **is said** Mufasa

-Unexpected **word orders** can be seen:

l.76 in this pond is your daddy

l.20 but Simba's friend was Nala

-Subordinate clauses are not very common in Mikel's English narrative and he has some problems with the following:

l.15 he don't know what that island call

l.34 I was very angry because you went the one that I said no

l.41 Zazu saw Mufasa where was Simba there over on that tree

4. Discourse and pragmatics. Mikel gives most of the relevant information in his production and he seems to be more confident and fluent once he gets into the story; the earlier parts of the text contain more hesitations and recapitulations than the later parts. Mikel follows the pages of the story as the interlocutor turns them. He uses language and intonation typical of oral storytelling and he combines direct and indirect speech:

l.22 no we no must go there

l.74 stop come in here

l.23 because my father said not to go here

l.61 but Rafiki thinked because Simba was a big lion.

More specific aspects of Mikel's narrative include deixis and the use of connectors. The terms he uses for space deixis are **here** (twice) **there** (6 times); and **now** (twice) **then** (12 times)

for time deixis. Mikel has problems with reference and he mixes singular and plural, second and third person singular, 'he' and 'she', 'his/her' and he also repeats the subject:

l.7 **they** (he) had a brother called eScar

l.58 **those** (that) food was grubs

l.60 and this made **you** (him) bigger

l.66 **he** (she/ Nala) said

l.75 and Rafiki is show him where is **her** (his) daddy

l.50 But Scar **he** say it

l.57 and **them** they give him nice food

The most common connector is **and** that is mentioned 32 times, he also uses **but** (12 times) and because (7 times).

RESULTS IN BASQUE

Mikel produced 74 utterances in Basque and the Mean Length Utterance was 8.18 (SD 2.81).

1. Phonetics. Mikel has a native accent in Basque and no specific articulatory problems except for the word 'hiena' which he pronounces in two different ways:

2.26, 2.28 /hai/ 'hiena' (hyena)

2.16, 2.22 /hei/ 'hiena' (hyena)

2. Vocabulary. The total number of words (tokens) produced by Mikel are 457 and as there are 196 different word types the type/token ratio is 0.428. Mikel seems to have no problems with vocabulary except for lexical terms that he has never used in Basque such as the above mentioned 'hyenas'. It is interesting to see that he translates 'wildebeest' as bulls `zezenak´ which is near enough but by no means exact.

2.30 **zezenak** etorri ziren (the bulls came)

Mikel uses the Spanish translation of Lion King 'rey león' instead of the Basque trasnlation but he is able to use the words 'lion' and 'king' in Basque when they don't go together ('leioa', 'erregea').

2.7 baina erakutsi zion **El rey león** oihane guztia (but the lion king showed him the jungle)

2.77 ez da **el rey león** (it is not the lion king)

2.47 Simba **leioa** (Simba the lion)

2.4 **erregia** gonbidatu zion animaliai etortzeko (the king invited the animals to come)

When Mikel tries to say the word 'enemy' he says 'ertsain' instead of 'etsai'. It could be a lexical mistake or a problem with pronunciation.

2.8 baina Mufasa zeukan **ertsain** bat (but M. had an'enemy)

3. Grammar. Mikel narrates the story in the past and he has less problems than in English with the past tenses but he also uses the future. There is some confusion between the verbs 'egon' and 'izan' which are both 'to be' in English:

2.59 baina **zuen** sua (but had a fire)

2.61 baina **zauen** sua (but there was a fire)

2.65 itxungi **zauen** euriak (the rain stopped)

Mikel also has some problems with modal verbs in Basque:

2.19 **baldin dezakezu** (if you can)

2.21 **Ezin barre** (don't laugh)

Mikel seems to know the different cases in Basque but he still has some problems with the ergative, that is the subject case for transitive verbs. The ending for this case is 'k' and he alternates the correct ending with the 'zero' ending that corresponds to the subject of intransitive verbs:

2.8 baina **Mufasa** zeukan ertsain bat (but M. had an enemy)

2.14 baina **Mufasak** esan zion.. (but M. told him)

2.37 **Escar** esan zion.. (S. told him)

2.75 **Escarrek** salto egin zuen (S. jumped)

In general terms the word order is correct but there are a few utterances which do not sound natural in Basque:

2.15 ezin zarete joan hori tokira (you cannot go there)

2.16 zergatik daze hienak (because there are hyenas)

The Basque text presents a large number of subordinate clauses and most of them are correct:

2.28 zer pentsatu zuen hortxe zauzela hainak (he thought that the hyenas were there)

2.29-31 Baina Mufasa prest zegoenien Simbari arrapatzeko zezenak etorri ziren (but the bulls came when M. was about to catch S.)

2.33 Erakutsikotzut hori non ilda dagoen (I'll show you where he has died)

2.58 baina joan zienien ikusi zuen Escar (but when he went he saw S.)

There is some interferance from Spanish in the following utterance:

2.80 esateko **que** bera zela el rey león (in order to say that he was the lion king)

4. Discourse and pragmatics. Mikel presents high fluency when he tells the story in Basque and his narrative includes all the relevant parts. He uses the language and intonation typical of oral

storytelling and combines direct and reported speech. Mikel consults his interlocutor while he is telling the story in Basque, in fact he tries to get his interlocutor's attention:

2.39 amama (grandma) erakutsiko dizut non dagoen Simba leioa haundia (I'll show you where S. the big lion is)

2.48-49 Erakutsikotzut dau hemen (I'll show you that he is here)

More specific aspects of Mikel's Basque narrative include deixis and connectors. The most common time deictic expression is 'gero' (then, later) which appears seven times. The other time expression Mikel uses is 'lehenago' (before) which he uses once. The place decitic expressions include 'hemen ' (here, used twice) eta hor (there, used twice). Person deixis is expressed by 'hau' (once), 'hauxe' (six times), 'hori' (three times) meaning 'this', 'that' and bera (twice) meaning 'he'.

Mikel begins a large number of utterances with 'baina' (but), in fact he mentions 'baina' twenty eight times in the narration. He also uses 'eta', (meaning 'and') twenty six times. The text also contains some connectors which a frequent borrowing from Basque into Spanish:

2.41 **ya** S. euki zuen bi lagun (S. had two friends)

2.78 **es que**

2.80 **esateko que** bera zala el rey león (in order to say that he was the lion king)

RESULTS IN SPANISH

The Spanish text is much shorter than the other two. It includes 35 utterances and the mean length utterance is 6.17.

1. Phonetics. Mikel's pronunciation in Spanish is native and he has no problems with segmentals, stress or intonation. The only pronunciation problem is the word 'hyenas'. The first time he uses the word he starts to use the English pronunciation only to correct it to the Spanish one. Later, he alternates the English pronunciation with the Spanish one.

3.11 /hai/ esos hienas (those hyenas)

3.23 /hai/

3.26 /hie/

Mikel adapts the name 'Scar' to Spanish by adding an epenthetic /e/ but his pronunciation of another character 'Zazu:' sounds quite English.

3.23, 3.34, 3.36 Escar

2. Vocabulary. The total number of words (tokens) produced by Mikel in Spanish are 216 and as there are 82 different word types the type/token ratio is 0.384. The vocabulary he uses is correct but it is quite poor. He has some problems to use the word 'hyenas' in Spanish and he hesitates between 'haienas' and 'hienas'.

3. Grammar. Mikel has some problems with pronouns in Spanish:

3.4 pero no sabe quien es **estes** (but don't know who this is)

3.9 y **el otro** es Nala (and the other is Nala)

In Spanish, the story was narrated in the present. The tenses Mikel used are the present simple and the present continuous. Mikel uses the present perfect once in the utterance:

3.39 está diciendo que el rey **se ha matado** (he is saying that the king has been killed)

Mikel has problems with the present tense of the irregular verb 'saber' (to know) . He uses the third person singular:

3.4. pero **no sabe** quien es estes (but don't know who this is)

3.11 **no sabe** esos hai hienas.. (don't know those hyenas..)

He also has some problems with agreement like in:

3.20 y luego P. y T. **viene**.. (and then P. and T. come)

There is no specific problem with word order although there are some utterances that are common in the Spanish spoken int he Basque Country:

3.12 Pero este sabes quien es (do you know who this is?)

The examples of subordination are scarce but they don't present problems:

3.18. está diciendo que aquí están los reyes (he is saying that the kings are here)

3.23 y Escar está diciendo que si no los haienas van a matarle a él (and S. is saying that otherwise the hyenas are going to kill him)

3.39 está diciendo que el rey león se ha matado (he is saying that the lion king has been killed)

There are no specific problems with negatives and interrogatives. In general terms the grammar of the Spanish narrative is quite acceptable although there are occasional mistakes.

4. Discourse and pragmatics

The Spanish text is very different to the other two. It is much shorter and relies upon interaction between the child and the interlocutor. The child is loath to tell the story and therefore continual prompting is need to get him to speak. What he says tells us little sense about the story of the Lion King and is more like an exercise in naming pictures and characters.

Even though there are more incomplete sentences than in Basque or English, Mikel can produce relatively long utterances and he does not hesitate in the middle of the sentence to find

words. Moreover, unlike in the other two texts, he mentions the episode in which the hyenas get pricked by the thistles, which does not appear in the pictures in the book.

l.25 Pero pero uno se va a picar (but one is going to get pricked)

l.26 una hiena se va a picar (a hyena is going to get pricked)

Other aspects of Mikel's discourse include deixis and connectors. Time deixis is expressed by saying 'luego' (then, later) four times and 'ahora' once. The only expression for space deixis is 'aquí' (here) which he says twice. Mikel has some problems with articles and gender in person deixis:

3.29 **esto** es Simba (this is S.)

3.7 es el nombre **el rey león** (it's the name the lion king)

3.17 sabes quién está haciendo **rey león** a S. (do you know what the lion king is doing to S.')

The most frequent connector Mikel uses in Spanish is 'y' (nine times). He also uses 'pero' (four times) and 'porque' (twice).

DISCUSSION

According to the data we have just presented, Mikel's strongest language is Basque. Even though the English text includes four more utterances than the Basque text; the latter presents other characteristics: the mean length utterance and the type/token ratio are higher than in English and there are fewer mistakes and hesitations in Basque than in English. Therefore, Mikel's production is more fluent and accurate in Basque than in English in spite of the fact that he has only seen the English version of the story.

The Spanish production differs from the other two because Mikel's production has to be elicited by his interlocutor and his production is limited to the description of a few elements in each of the pictures; and unlike the other two versions, the story is in the present. It seems that the fact that Mikel has never been told stories in Spanish is reflected his production as he has not developed

the necessary strategies to tell the story in Spanish. His production in Spanish is an attempt to tell a story governed by pictures but the story is not formed. Mikel is aware of his lower competence in Spanish and he includes a couple of comments on this competence:

3.1. Pero no sabe quien es éstes (I don't know who this is)
3.8. No me sabe esos... esos hienas como se llaman (I don't know how those hyenas are called)

In spite of these problems with the Spanish version, his mean length utterance in Spanish is slightly higher than in English and his type/token ratio is higher than in English. Although the Spanish version is shorter we can observe that it contains fewer mistakes than the English one. Moreover, Mikel has a native accent in Spanish (and Basque) but not in English.

The relative development of Mikel's three languages is related both to his own family situation and the linguistic situation of the community at large. Annick De Houwer (1995) observes that 'language patterns existing in the community at large are only relevant to the extent that they form part of the bilingual child's microcosm in early childhood' (224). Mikel is already five years old and he is immersed in the school socialization process where he is widening his social networks through interaction with other school children. Our data indicate that by this age the influence of the community at large is reflected in the child's linguistic development. Even though the school language is Basque, some of Mikel's classmates come from Spanish speaking backgrounds. Futhermore, Spanish is the majority language in the community and all children are exposed to it. Another observation worth mentioning is that code mixing is not common in our data. There are no examples of Basque or Spanish words in English. When telling the story in Basque or Spanish if Mikel needs to use a word he has learned from the English video he makes an effort to adapt it into these languages. Mikel uses some Spanish connectors when telling the story in Basque but these borrowings are common in Basque because of the influence of Spanish. It is very likely that Mikel is using expressions he has learned in Basque rather than borrowing directly from Spanish. This indirect borrowing shows the complexity of multilingual acquisition as compared to bilingual acquisition, lexical terms and structures can be used in one of the languages because other speakers have previously borrowed them from another of the languages involved and not because the child has borrowed them directly from that language. Mikel's production in the

three languages also presents some examples of cross-linguistic influence mainly in pronunciation in the three languages. Some examples of word order and the use of some verbs could also be resulting from cross-linguistic influence.

Although this study presents some limitationsi because it is based on a small corpus, its results suggests that early trilingualism presents some specific characteristics as compared to first language acqusiition and early bilingualism.

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